Pygmalion Effect:

Teachers’ Expectations and How They Impact Student Achievement

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**Introduction:**

* Most teachers know a little bit about the Pygmalion effect, or the idea that one's expectations about a person can eventually lead that person to behave and achieve in ways that confirm those expectations.
* A majority of educators feel they are good judges of character. With years of teaching experience under their belts, they are more often than not able to size up students correctly, at least in their own estimation. Many teachers believe that they can judge ahead of time, sometimes by just a glance the first day of school, how certain students are likely to, over time, achieve and behave. This labeling and pre-judgment is the very essence of the Pygmalion effect.

**Statement of the Problem**

* When adapted to the field of education, the Pygmalion effect has far reaching ramifications on the effectiveness of today’s teaching approach and execution. It is essential that educators become distinctly aware of just how much effect their assumptions on a student’s performance can have on that student’s abilities. This is particularly critical when those assumptions have negative connotations. When an educator anticipates that a student will perform poorly, the student will inevitably perform according to those expectations.

**Review of Related Literature**

**-Intervention Topics**

Avoid unreliable sources of information about students' learning potential, e.g., social stereotypes, the biases of other teachers, etc.

Set goals (for individuals, groups, classrooms, and whole schools) in terms of floors (minimally acceptable standards), not ceilings; communicate to students that they have the ability to meet those standards.

Emphasize that different students are good at different things and let students see that this is true by having them observe one another's products, performances, etc.

Concentrate on extending warmth, friendliness, and encouragement to all students.

Monitor student progress closely so as to keep expectations of individuals current.

In giving students feedback, stress continuous progress relative to previous levels of mastery, rather than comparisons with statistical norms or other individuals.

In giving students feedback, focus on giving useful information, not just evaluation of success or failure.

In general, think in terms of stretching the students' minds by stimulating them and encouraging them to achieve as much as they can, not in terms of "protecting" them from failure or embarrassment.(Cotton 1989)

**-The Pygmalion Effect works through the self-fulfilling prophecy.**

..."You see, really and truly, apart from the things anyone can pick up (the dressing and the proper way of speaking, and so on), the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated. I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins, because he always treats me as a flower girl, and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you, because you always treat me as a lady, and always will.” George Bernard Shaw - Pygmalion

**-Pygmalion Effect: Fact or Fiction?**

“Strong empirical support was found for a reciprocal relationship between teachers’ behavior and students’ engagement. Teachers’ interactions with students predicted students’ behavioral and emotional engagement in the classroom, both directly and through their effects on student’s perceptions of their interactions with teachers.” (Skinner, Ellen A., Belmont, Michael J.1993).

**-Four Factors in Mediation of Teacher Expectancy Effects**

**Central factors:**

Climate (affect): Teachers appear to create a warmer socio-emotional climate for their “special” students. This warmth appears to be at least partially communicated by nonverbal cues.

Input (effort): Teachers appear to teach more material and more difficult material to their “special” students.

**Additional factors:**

Output: Teachers appear to give their “special” students greater opportunities for responding. These opportunities are offered both verbally and nonverbally (e.g. giving a student more time in which to answer).

Feedback: Teachers appear to give their “special” students more informative feedback, both verbal and nonverbal, as to how these students have been performing. (Rosenthal 1994)

**-What can be done to help teachers be aware of and combat the Pygmalion Effect?**

Efforts aimed at helping teachers to avoid harmful stereotyping of students often begin with activities designed to raise teachers' awareness of their unconscious biases. (Cotton. 1989)

**-Independent Evaluation**

SETTING GOALS WHICH ARE EXPRESSED AS MINIMALLY ACCEPTABLE LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT rather than using prior achievement data to establish ceiling levels beyond which students would not be expected to progress (Good, 1987)

**-Cycle of Expectations**

The self-fulfilling model posits that sales managers’ expectations and treatment of salespersons will be influenced by background factors of the salespersons (e.g., age gender, ethnicity, experience). These expectations and treatment by the sales manager will, in turn, influence the salespersons’ self-expectations, which will ultimately influence the performance of the salespersons. (Chowdhury, 2007)

**-Defiance of Expectations**

“I ask them to define a research problem, search the literature, design an experiment and come in with results all in one semester. Now nobody can do all that in one semester. I can't do that in one semester, but these are juniors: they don't know it can't be done; so they all do it. They do amazing things.” (Rhem, 1999).

**-Teacher Dependence**

They see teaching as a technical activity of “transmitting” the certified content of the school curriculum from books to students. Similarly, they see learning to teach as the simple act of acquiring technical knowledge and skills that will allow teachers to dispense information to students efficiently—which involves providing different types of educational experiences to students of different abilities. (Villegas, 2007)

**-Great Expectations Yield Great Results**

They concluded that students whose teachers expected a high increase of learning ability within the next year, indeed had higher intelligence scores at the end of the school year. (Jussim, L. & Harber, K.2005)

Students' early performance and gender predicted teachers' expectations, with higher expectations for high achieving students and girls. (Madon, S. & Jussim, L. 1998)

**-Low Expectations Yield Poor Results**

“…compared to their treatment of low expectation students, teachers were more likely to praise high expectation students for correct answers, less likely to criticize them for failure, and more likely to try to elicit an improved response from them when they failed to answer correctly the first time.” (Brophy, 1974)

Low achieving students tend to receive more criticism and less praise from professional teachers. Teachers tend to praise high expectation students more. (Copper, 1979)

**-Teachers as Divisive Forces**

Taken together, the findings in this study suggest that teachers play a role in enlarging existing socio-economic background differences between children, with differential effects for majority and minority children. (Speybroeck,S. & Damme,J.,2012)

The evidence presented here suggests that teachers base their expectations upon past performance to a much greater degree than upon ethnicity, sex, socioeconomic status, or intellectual ability. (Clifton, 1981)

**-Teachers as Agents of Stagnation**

"How should mature-age student-teachers respond to expectations that are in most cases groundless?" Here things don't look too good. Rosenthal (1968/1992) showed that when pupils improve against expectations they are disliked by their teachers and in some cases show signs of being in conflict. (Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson,l 1968)

  If teachers are able to recognize their own nonverbal behaviors, they can determine if the behaviors are appropriate to the goals of the task and occur enough to become reliable cues to the students. (Woolfolk,A.E, & Brooks,D.M.,1985)

**-Organizational Control**

The implication here is that organizations have a responsibility to shape behavior by creating expectant environments that induce positive behavior. Of course, we are really talking about people when we speak of such abstract things such as "organizations" and "environments." Organizations are made up of people and when we speak of creating expectant environments we are speaking about developing teachers who have high expectations of their students. (Etheriggton , 2011)

Overall there are many facets to the topic and many factors to be considered from a variety of perspectives.

**Hypothesis**

* **Hypothesis 1:**

When teachers express an opinion towards a student’s academic performance, that opinion tends to become reality. A survey of 3 second grade teachers in the below cited public school will ask them the importance of information being passed on between teachers year to year.

* **Hypothesis 2:**

Presented with an anticipation of what his academic performance will be by a teacher, a student will perform accordingly. A group of 60 second grade students in an urban public school will be surveyed to ascertain their opinions of what , if any, feelings their teacher has verbally or nonverbally expressed about them.

* **Intervention:**

Seminar for teachers at the beginning of the school year on the importance of relaying only factual information on students to other teachers, being careful to keep subjective opinions on capability and performance to themselves.

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Appendix A

**Student Survey**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **5-Strongly Agree** | **4-Agree** | **3- Neither Agree or Disagree** | **2- Disagree** | **1- Strongly Disagree** |
| I usually feel my teacher thinks I am not smart. |  |  |  |  |  |
| I think my 2nd grade teacher likes me. |  |  |  |  |  |
| I feel my teacher thinks I am a well behaved child. |  |  |  |  |  |
| I never get into trouble for my behavior in class. |  |  |  |  |  |
| My 1st grade teacher did not like me. |  |  |  |  |  |
| I got good conduct marks in 1st grade. |  |  |  |  |  |
| My 1st grade teacher liked me. |  |  |  |  |  |
| I got bad conduct marks in 1st grade. |  |  |  |  |  |
| When something goes wrong in class, my classmates blame me. |  |  |  |  |  |
| I think my 2nd grade teacher does not like me. |  |  |  |  |  |
| I feel my teacher thinks I am a badly behaved child. |  |  |  |  |  |
| I usually feel my teacher thinks I am very smart. |  |  |  |  |  |

Appendix B

**Teacher Survey**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **5-Strongly Agree** | **4-Agree** | **3- Neither Agree or Disagree** | **2- Disagree** | **1- Strongly Disagree** |
| I value the non-academic feedback I get from other teachers on their previous students. |  |  |  |  |  |
| I think passing along my own opinion to other teachers is important to pupil development. |  |  |  |  |  |
| I feel asking a previous instructor for non-academic information on a student is simply doing my due diligence. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Non-academic information passed along from previous instructors is more valuable in evaluating students than academic information. |  |  |  |  |  |
| I do think there are “bad” children who cannot be changed. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Well-behaved children are always smarter than those who do not behave well in class. |  |  |  |  |  |
| I always evaluate my students based only on their individual merits and behaviors in my classroom. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Children who misbehave in class do so because they cannot perform well academically. |  |  |  |  |  |
| I make some decisions, like beginning of year seating charts, based on feedback from previous instructors, without having interacted with children in the class. |  |  |  |  |  |
| It is especially important for new teachers to seek the non-academic feedback of their students’ prior teachers. |  |  |  |  |  |

Appendix C

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am currently a graduate student in Brooklyn College’s Childhood Education Master’s program. I am conducting a research study on the effects of teacher expectations of students and their subsequent academic performance. This phenomenon is called the Pygmalion effect in education.

I would like to request your permission to allow your child to fill out a survey on his/her feelings towards his/her current teacher and about the relationship with this teacher. The survey to be used will not ask for any information about the specific identity of your child, such as his/her name or gender, and the data collected will be used for my research study only. The goal of the study is to increase the academic integrity of the public schools.

All results for this study will be reported as a group study and the participants’ names and information will be anonymous. I greatly appreciate your support. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me. [gleng2041@aol.com](mailto:gleng2041@aol.com) or at 917-945-7485

Sincerely,

Glen Gochal

I give my child\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ permission to be a participant in this research study.

Parent’s Signature:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix D

Dear \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,

I am currently a graduate student in Brooklyn College’s Childhood Education Master’s program. I am conducting a research study on the Pygmalion effect in the educational process. I am requesting your permission to use information gathered from your students for my research study. Students would be answering a survey without revealing their names, or any other identifying characteristics such as gender or address.

All results for this study will be reported as a group study and the participants’ names and information will be anonymous. I greatly appreciate your support. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me. [Gleng2041@aol.com](mailto:Gleng2041@aol.com) or at 9147-945-7485

Sincerely,

Glen Gochal

I, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ give my permission to be a participant in this research study.

Teacher’s Signature:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix E

Dear Principal\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,

I am currently a graduate student in Brooklyn College’s Childhood Education Master’s program and am conducting a research study on Pygmalion effect on the educational process. I am requesting your permission to use select second grade students from your school to fill out a survey. The survey would ask each child about his/her feelings towards his/her current teacher and about the relationship with this teacher. There will be no identifying information requested in this survey, such as name or gender.

All results for this study will be reported as a group study and therefore, the participants’ names and information will be anonymous. I greatly appreciate your support. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me. [Gleng2041@aol.com](mailto:Gleng2041@aol.com) or at 9147-945-7485

Sincerely,

Glen Gochal

I, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ give my permission to be a participant in this research study.

Principal’s Signature:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_